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Religious affect and personal happiness: Are there significant differences between Catholic adolescents in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland?

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Abstract

This study set out to explore levels of religious affect (measured by the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity) and personal affect (measured by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire) among samples of Catholic students in the Republic of Ireland attending fifth- and sixth-year classes ($N = 3,015$) and Catholic students in Northern Ireland attending sixth-form classes ($N = 1,624$), after taking into account individual differences in sex, age, and personality (as measured by the abbreviated form of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised). Consistent with the findings of previous research, the data demonstrated a significant positive association between religious affect and personal happiness: religious students are happier students. Catholic students in Northern Ireland hold a more positive attitude toward Christianity (higher levels of religious affect) than Catholic students in the Republic of Ireland. Nonetheless, there is no significant difference in levels of happiness (personal affect) between Catholic students in the two jurisdictions.

Keywords: Catholic Church, happiness, Northern Ireland, psychology of religion, religious affect, Republic of Ireland

Introduction

The present study was designed to explore the religious affect and personal affect of Catholic students on the politically divided island of Ireland. Of the thirty-two counties on the Island, six north-eastern counties continue, since Partition in 1921, to be governed within the United Kingdom, known as Northern Ireland, and sometimes referred to as ‘the North’. The remaining twenty-six counties form the Republic of Ireland, independent since 1922 and a republic since 1949, often simply designated as Ireland, and sometimes called ‘the South’. These two differing contexts have established themselves over what is now an extended period of time, keeping, it has been suggested, ‘the two Irelands in mutual isolation, preserved by mutually exclusive views of history’ (Foster, 2014, p. 325). Students attending sixth-form classes in Northern Ireland and fifth- and sixth-year classes, the equivalent age-group, in the Republic of Ireland, were the focus of the research. Sixth-form will be used generally in this article to refer to both cohorts.

The population of Northern Ireland is reported in the most recent census, taken in 2011, as 1.8 million, with 48% describing their religion as Protestant and 45% describing their religion as Catholic (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2011). As is well documented, the Catholic-Protestant split in Northern Ireland has resulted in long-standing issues between the two communities, erupting in ‘the Troubles’ during the period from 1968 to 1998. People, there, have continued to be identified, and to identify themselves, strongly with their religious tradition. With older generations shunning violence and hoping for better times for their children and grandchildren, relations between the two communities in the North were subsequently dominated by ‘the Peace Process’ which has seen people from both traditions, generally, striving for a peaceful resolution of outstanding issues between them (Coogan, 2006; McKittrick & McVea, 2000).

The population of the Republic, has continued to grow in recent years, from 4.59 million recorded in the census of 2011, to 4.76 million indicated in the 2016 census, even though net migration has fallen sharply, reversing the trend of net inward migration over the previous two decades and more (Central Statistics Office, 2017). In the Republic of Ireland the population has been and continues to be predominantly Catholic, reaching in the 2016 census a low point of 78.3% of the population, down from 84.2% in the 2011 census. Its congregation at 3.73 million in 2016 is down from 3.86 million in 2011, which was the highest since records began (Central Statistics Office, 2012, 2017). It is generally recognised that society in the Republic has been undergoing significant and rapid historical, social and cultural changes, certainly since the 1950s, but particularly from the 1990s and through into the new century (Anderson, Byrne, & Cullen, 2016; Williams, 2005; Fuller, 2004). From the highest practice rates in Europe in the 1970s, it is clear that there has developed ‘a significant variation in religiosity and practices among the Catholic population’ in the Republic in recent decades, with attendance at Sunday mass now in fast decline (Smith et al, 2013, p. 102; Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011). The defining issue in the South is not so much a Catholic-Protestant divide as an increasingly swift-moving debate about the contribution that traditional Christian values should make in shaping a society quickly embracing the globalised and secularised worldview dominant now in much of the Western world and beyond (Kelly, 2015).

The Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference (which continues to be organised on a thirty-two county basis) has opened up a discussion in recent years on all these things, establishing in *Share the Good News*, its National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, a framework indicating principles and guidelines for the religious education and faith development of young people and adults in both jurisdictions, acknowledging the different education systems and needs that have emerged over the years (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010). The

dominance of the Catholic schools system has become a bone of contention for some in the Republic of Ireland (Coolahan, Hussey, & Kilfeather, 2012; McGrady, 2014). In the North, the desire of the minority community to retain faith-based schools is claimed by some as having contributed to division, while others see the Catholic schools' commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation, as well as to educational excellence, as having been an essential ingredient in creating the possibility of dialogue (Coll, 2013; Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland, 2001). Many commentators in Ireland today argue that Catholics, as well as building up their own faith community, are called, precisely because of their Catholic faith and through Catholic schools, to contribute positively to the development of a more plural society by engaging enthusiastically in ecumenical outreach, inter-religious dialogue, and intercultural exchange (Byrne, 2017; Hession, 2015; Byrne, 2013; Lane, 2011; Mullally, 2010; Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010).

Research questions

Against this background three core research questions have been identified. The first research question concerns religious affect. Do the potentially different experiences of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland lead to significant differences in religious affect? The second research question concerns personal affect. Do the potentially different experiences of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland lead to significant differences in personal affect? The third research question concerns the connection between religious affect and personal affect. Are religious affect and personal affect correlated among Catholic students, or put another way, are religious students happier students?

Before operationalising these research questions four main areas require further clarification, namely the conceptualisation and measurement of religious affect, the conceptualisation and measurement of personal affect, the role of personality as a control

variable in assessing individual differences in religious affect and in personal affect, and the current empirical evidence concerning the connection between religious affect and personal affect.

Conceptualisation and assessment of religious affect

The centrality of religious affect within the empirical psychology of religion was highlighted by Francis (1978a, 1978b) and developed by the family of research stimulated by the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995). Francis (2009) has argued that the affective or attitudinal dimension of religion offered a particularly fruitful basis for co-ordinating empirical enquiry into the correlates, antecedents and consequences of religiosity across the life span. The affective or attitudinal dimension appears particularly attractive for the following reasons.

Drawing on the pioneering analysis of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), Francis (1978a, 1978b) argued that attitudinal measures should focus on accessing the affective dimension of religiosity, in a way that is clearly distinguished from the cognitive dimension (concerned with beliefs) and from the behavioural dimension (concerned with practice). The affective dimension is able to transcend the divisions between denominational perspectives, while beliefs tend to polarise such divisions. The affective dimension is less likely to be distorted by personal and contextual factors, while practice tends to be subject to all kinds of personal or social constraints. Moreover, the affective dimension of religiosity can be accessed by instruments which can function in a comparatively stable manner over a wide age range. While the sophistication with which beliefs are formulated and tested clearly develops over the life span (see, for example, Fowler, 1981), attitudinal statements concerned with positive and negative affect can be formulated in ways which are equally acceptable during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Francis, 1989; Francis & Stubbs, 1987).

Initial research employing the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity was

restricted to the English language. More recently the research has been extended by a series of studies developing forms of the instrument in a number of languages, including Arabic (Munayer, 2000), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, & Lewis, 2010), Chinese (Tiliopoulos, Francis, & Jiang, 2013), Dutch (Francis & Hermans, 2000), French (Lewis & Francis, 2003), German (Francis & Kwiran 1999), Greek (Youtika, Joseph, & Diduca 1999), Italian (Crea, Baiocco, Ioverno, Buzzi, & Francis, 2014), Norwegian (Francis & Enger 2002), Portuguese (Ferreira & Neto 2002), Romanian (Francis, Ispas, Robbins, Ilie, & Iliescu, 2009), Serbian (Flere, Francis, & Robbins, 2011), Slovakian (Lewis, Adamovová, & Francis, 2008), Slovenian (Flere, Klanjsek, Francis, & Robbins, 2008), Spanish (Campo-Arias, Oviedo, Dtaz, & Cogollo, 2006), Swedish (Eek, 2001), and Welsh (Evans & Francis, 1996).

The twenty-four item Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity has also spawned a seven-item short form commended for use when time is short (Francis, 1993; Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Lester, & Brown, 1995), and variants for use among other faith communities, including the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam (Sahin & Francis, 2002), the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism (Francis & Katz, 2007), and the Santosh-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Hinduism (Francis, Santosh, Robbins, & Vij, 2008).

Conceptualisation and assessment of personal affect

The centrality of personal affect within positive psychology has been highlighted by a number of commentators (Argyle, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Kristjánsson, 2010; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within this broad field of positive psychology there is a range of measures accessing various components of personal affect and psychological wellbeing (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). One measure that has come to play a key role in the exploration of the connection between personal affect and religious affect is the Oxford Happiness Inventory which was developed by Michael Argyle and his associates (Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989). This

operationalisation of happiness embraced three components of the construct: the frequency and degree of positive affect or joy; the average level of satisfaction over a period; and the absence of negative feelings, such as depression and anxiety. Working from this definition, they developed the Oxford Happiness Inventory for which they reported an internal reliability of .90 using alpha (Cronbach, 1951), and a 7-week test-retest reliability of .78. Construct validity was established against recognised measures of the three hypothesised components of happiness showing correlations of .32 with the positive affect scale of the Bradburn Balanced Affect measure (Bradburn, 1969), -.52 with the Beck Depression Inventory, and .57 with Argyle's life satisfaction index.

Initial research employing the Oxford Happiness Inventory was restricted to the English language. More recently such research has been extended by a series of studies developing forms of the instrument in Arabic (Abdel-Khalek, 2005), Chinese (Lu & Shih, 1997; Lu, Shih, Lin, & Ju, 1997; Lu & Lin, 1998; Lu, Gilmore, Kao, Weng, Hu, Chern, Huang, & Shih, 2001), German (Lewis, Francis, & Ziebertz, 2002) Japanese (Furnham & Cheng, 1999), Hebrew (Francis & Katz, 2000), Italian (Meleddu, Guicciardi, Scalas, & Fadda, 2012), Persian (Liaghatdar, Jafarc, Abedi, & Samiee, 2008; Bayani, 2008), and Portuguese (Neto, 2001).

The Oxford Happiness Inventory has also spawned a small family of related measures, employing slightly different items in a different response format, including the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Short-form (see Hills & Argyle, 2002) and the Oxford Happiness Measure (see Elken, Francis, & Robbins, 2010).

Linking religious affect and personal happiness

There has been a long research tradition within the empirical psychology of religion exploring the association between religion and happiness. Reviewing the literature available

in the mid-1990s, Robbins and Francis (1996) concluded that the lack of clarity emerging from the research evidence may, at least partly, have been a consequence of the range of measures of religiosity and happiness employed. They proposed a long-term research strategy whereby the same measures of religious affect and personal affect were employed among different populations. In their foundation study, Robbins and Francis (1996) administered the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity and the Oxford Happiness Inventory among a sample of 360 first-year undergraduate students in Wales. This study reported a significant positive correlation between religious affect and personal happiness. Subsequently six other studies were published that confirmed the finding from the original study. These studies draw on the following samples: 212 undergraduate students in the United States of America (Francis & Lester, 1997); 295 individuals, ranging in age from late teens to late seventies, recruited from participants attending a variety of courses and workshops on the psychology of religion (Francis & Robbins, 2000); 994 15- to 16-year-old secondary school students (Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000); 496 members of the University of the Third Age (Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000); 456 undergraduate students in Wales (Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000); and 89 students in Wales (Francis, Robbins, & White, 2003).

Taken together these seven samples ($N = 360, 212, 295, 995, 456, 496, 89$) demonstrated a consistent pattern of a significant positive correlation between religion and happiness based on employing the same instruments in different contexts. The scientific strategy of replication seemed to be bearing fruit, although further replication studies remain desirable. On the other hand, two further replication studies failed to find this positive association between scores recorded on the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, using the German translation of the Oxford Happiness Inventory among 331 students (Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2003) and using the Estonian translation of the Oxford Happiness Measures among 150 students (Francis, Elken, & Robbins, 2012).

Subsequently, working within other faith traditions, the Oxford Happiness Inventory has been administered alongside the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism (Francis & Katz, 2007) in three studies in Israel reported by Francis and Katz (2002) among 298 female students, Francis, Katz, Yablon, and Robbins (2004) among 203 male students, and Francis, Yablon, and Robbins (2014) among 348 female students. The Oxford Happiness Inventory has been administered alongside the Ok Religious Attitude Scale (Islam) (Ok, 2016), by Francis, Ok, and Robbins (2017) among 348 students in Turkey, and alongside the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam (Sahin & Francis, 2002) by Tekke, Francis, and Robbins (2018) among 189 students in Malaysia. The Oxford Happiness Inventory has been administered alongside the Santosh-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Hinduism (Francis, Santosh, Robbins, & Vij, 2008), by Tiliopoulos, Francis, and Slattery (2011) among 100 Hindu affiliates from the Bunt caste in South India. All six studies reported a positive significant correlation between these measures of religious affect and scores recorded on the Oxford Happiness Inventory.

Personality as a control variable

When Robbins and Francis (1996) proposed their series of studies exploring the association between religious affect and personal affect, they also recommended including personality measures as control variables, especially given the consensus of research confirming the hypothesis advanced by Eysenck (1983) linking happiness with stable extraversion. The two orthogonal personality continua measuring the dimension from introversion through ambiversion to extraversion, and the dimension from emotional stability through emotional lability to neuroticism have been well operationalised by the family of personality measures developed by Eysenck, including the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991). The Eysenckian

self-report measures also routinely include a lie scale.

Method

Procedure

As part of a larger study concerned with sixth-form religion in Ireland, building on and extending work pioneered by John Greer in 1968 and documented by Greer (1972), schools catering for sixth-form students in Northern Ireland, and for fifth- and sixth-year students, the equivalent age-group, in the Republic of Ireland, were invited to participate in the project during 2011 (Byrne & Francis, 2019). The aim was to gather data from over 3,000 students in each nation. Within Northern Ireland both Catholic and Protestant schools were involved. All students attending the sixth-form classes within the participating schools were asked to complete a copy of the survey instrument. In the South responses were sought from young people in the variety of school types and patronage models provided for in the Republic, most of which have high percentages of pupils who self-identify as Catholic. Students were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity and given the option not to submit their copy of the questionnaire for analysis.

Participants

All told successfully completed questionnaires were submitted by 3,848 students in the Republic of Ireland and by 3,523 students in Northern Ireland. Of the total participants in the Republic of Ireland 3,015 identified themselves as attending a Catholic church, and in Northern Ireland 1,624 identified themselves as attending a Catholic church. The following analyses were conducted on these Catholic students. Of the 3,015 Catholic students in the Republic of Ireland, 1,460 were males and 1,555 were females; 255 were aged 16 years, 1,079 were aged 17 years; 1,198 were aged 18 years; and 483 were aged 19 years. Of the 1,624 Catholic students in Northern Ireland, 817 were males and 807 were females; 351 were aged 16 years, 860 were aged 17 years, and 413 were aged 18 years.

Measures

The participants completed three measures: happiness was assessed by the Oxford Happiness Inventory; religiosity was assessed by the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity; personality was assessed by the Short-form Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised.

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989) is a 29-item multiple choice instrument. Each item contains four options, constructed to reflect incremental steps defined as: unhappy or mildly depressed, a low level of happiness, a high level of happiness, and mania. The respondents are asked to 'pick out the one statement in each group which best describes the way you have been feeling over the past week, including today.' An example item reads: 'I don't feel life is particularly rewarding' (unhappy or mildly depressed), 'I feel life is rewarding' (a low level of happiness), 'I feel that life is very rewarding' (a high level of happiness), and 'I feel that life is overflowing with rewards' (mania).

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995) is a 24-item instrument designed to measure affective responses to five aspects of the Christian tradition: God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. Each item is assessed on a five-point scale: 'agree strongly', 'agree', 'not certain', 'disagree', and 'disagree strongly'. Example items include: 'Prayer helps me a lot; God is very real to me'; 'I think the Bible is out of date'; 'I know that Jesus helps me; and I think church services are boring'.

The abbreviated form of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992; Francis, Robbins, Loudon, & Haley, 2001) is a 24-item instrument composed of four twelve-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and a Lie Scale. Each item is assessed on a two point scale: 'yes' and 'no'. The

present analyses drew on the Extraversion Scale and the Neuroticism Scale. Example items from the Extraversion Scale include: ‘Are you a talkative person?’ and ‘Can you easily get some life into a rather dull party?’ Example items from the Neuroticism Scale include: ‘Does your mood often go up and down?’ and ‘Are you a worrier?’

Sex was coded in the conventional manner: males (1) and females (2). Location was coded as follows: Republic of Ireland (1) and Northern Ireland (2).

Results and discussion

The first step in analysing the data from the new replication study concerns an examination of the psychometric properties of the four measures employed. Table 1, therefore, presents the means, standard deviations and alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) for the Oxford Happiness Inventory, the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, and the Extraversion and Neuroticism Scales of the short-form Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised. All four measures show satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability according to the alpha coefficient (DeVellis, 2003).

- insert tables 1 and 2 about here -

The second step in analysing the data concerns an examination of the bivariate correlations between the four primary variables, taking into account also sex, age, and location within either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. These data are presented in table 2. Given the large size of the sample and the number of bivariate correlations being interpreted simultaneously only correlations reaching at least the one percent level of probability will be discussed as significant. There are six main points of interest emerging from the correlation matrix. First, in terms of sex differences, the data demonstrate that females record higher scores than males on the measures of neuroticism, extraversion and religious affect. Males record higher scores than females on the measure of happiness. These findings are consistent with the findings of earlier studies. Second, in terms of age

differences, the data demonstrate a slight increase in religious affect scores and a slight decrease in happiness scores among the older students. In interpreting this finding it has to be recalled that the data are derived from a very restricted age band of students (16- to 19-years of age).

Third, in terms of the personality correlates of religious affect, the data demonstrate that a more positive attitude toward Christianity is associated with higher neuroticism scores ($r = .09$). This finding is consistent with the evidence advanced by Penny, Francis, and Robbins (2015) that higher religiosity may be associated with higher neuroticism scores.

Fourth, in terms of the personality correlates of personal happiness, the data demonstrate that higher levels of happiness are associated with higher extraversion scores ($r = .30$) and lower neuroticism scores ($r = -.36$). This finding is consistent with Eysenck's (1983) classic claim that "happiness is stable extraversion" and with subsequent clarification and amplification of that claim (Francis, 1999; Francis, Brown, Lester, & Philipchalk, 1998).

Fifth, in terms of the correlation between personal happiness and religious affect, the data demonstrated a significant positive correlation between religious affect and personal happiness ($r = .15$). This conclusion, is consistent with the previous studies exploring the correlation between scores recorded on the Oxford Happiness Inventory and the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity reported by Robbins and Francis (1996), Francis and Lester (1997), Francis and Robbins (2000), Francis, Jones, and Wilcox (2000), and Francis, Robbins, and White (2003).

Sixth, in terms of the primary research questions posed by the present study, concerning the comparative levels of personal happiness and religious affect recorded by Catholic students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, the data demonstrated a higher level of religious affect among Catholic students in Northern Ireland, but no significant differences between the two groups of Catholic students in terms of levels of

personal happiness.

Given the complex pattern of interrelationships between, on the one hand, religious affect and personal happiness and, on the other hand, personal factors (age and sex) and personality factors (extraversion and neuroticism) the impact of geographical location (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) on religious affect and personal happiness now need to be checked within the environment of multivariate analyses.

- insert table 3 and 4 about here -

The third step in analysing the data, therefore, draws on multiple regression specifically to address the first and second of the research questions posed by the present study. The first research question asked whether the experience of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland leads to significant differences in religious affect. The second research question asked whether the experience of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland leads to significant differences in personal affect. Tables 3 and 4 present the regression model in which religious affect (table 3) and personal happiness (table 4) stand as the dependent variable and the predictor variables were entered in the following fixed order: sex (female), age, extraversion, neuroticism, and geographical location (Northern Ireland). The main finding from these data, after sex, age, and individual difference in personality have been taken into account is that the multivariate analyses support the findings suggested by the bivariate correlations. Even after sex, age, and individual differences in personality have been taken into account, levels of religious affect are significantly higher among Catholic students in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland, but there are no significant differences in levels of personal happiness among Catholic students in the two nations.

- insert table 5 about here -

The fourth step in analysing the data draws on multiple regression specifically to address the third of the research questions posed by the present study. The third research question asked whether religious affect and personal affect are correlated among Catholic students, or put another way, are religious students happier students? Table 5 presents the regression model in which personal happiness stands as the dependent variable and the predictor variables were entered in the following fixed order: sex (female), age, extraversion, neuroticism, religious affect, and geographical location (Northern Ireland). The main finding from these data is that, after sex, age, and individual differences in personality have been taken into account, religious affect makes a significant additional positive contribution to levels of personal happiness. This conclusion is consistent with the patterns shown in previous research (see Tekke, Francis, & Robbins, 2018). Geographical location (Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland) contributes no additional predictive power to this model.

Conclusion

This study set out to address three specific research questions shaped within an analysis of the changing religious climate of the Republic of Ireland. These research questions were addressed by drawing on data provided by sixth-form students who self-identified as attending a Catholic church in the Republic of Ireland ($N = 3,015$) and in Northern Ireland ($N = 1,624$). Multiple regression analyses were employed to take into account individual differences in personal factors (sex and age) and psychological factors (extraversion and neuroticism). These three research question will now be addressed in the reverse order to that in which they were initially posed.

The third research question asked whether religious affect and personal affect are correlated among Catholic students within the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, or put another way, whether religious students are happier students. In some ways this is now a well-rehearsed research question which has been tested among other samples in Christian,

Hindu, Jewish and Muslim contexts. Data from the present study simply add further support to the growing consensus (discussed in the introduction to this paper) regarding the positive connection between religious affect (measured by the Francis family of attitude scales) and personal affect (measured by the Oxford family of happiness scales). Replication of such ‘established’ findings becomes increasingly recognised as an important and worthwhile component of the scientific enterprise within psychology (see Fradera, 2015).

The second research question asked whether the potentially different experiences of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland lead to significant differences in personal affect among Catholic sixth-form students. Data from the present study found no significant differences in the levels of reported personal happiness among Catholic students in the two nations.

The first research question asked whether the potentially different experiences of growing up Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland lead to significant differences in religious affect among Catholic sixth-form students. Data from the present study found significantly higher levels of religious affect among Catholic students within Northern Ireland than within the Republic of Ireland.

In summary, young Catholics in the Republic report a less positive attitude toward Christianity (lower levels of religious affect), when compared with a similar cohort in Northern Ireland. When it comes to happiness (personal affect), however, no significant difference between young Catholics North and South of the Irish border emerged in this research. The data affirmed, as in previous research referred to, a significant positive association between religious affect and personal happiness. The results that indicated no significant difference in personal affect between Catholic students in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, however, are at odds with the finding of significant difference of religious affect between the two cohorts. The fact that those who displayed higher religious affect

(Catholics in the North) did not also report higher levels of personal affect is noteworthy and requires further investigation.

Note

Building on and extending the research of John Greer initiated in 1968 (Greer, 1972), Professor Christopher A. Lewis and Professor Leslie J. Francis conducted the survey in Northern Ireland, and at the same time the survey was replicated in the Republic of Ireland by Dr Andrew McGrady and Dr Kevin Williams. The emergence of the Irish Centre for Religious Education has, through Dr. Gareth Byrne and Dr. Bernadette Sweetman, working in association with Professor Leslie J. Francis and Professor Christopher A. Lewis, provided the opportunity for the analysis presented in this article. The ICRE promotes high-level doctoral and post-doctoral research into the variety of approaches to religious education at primary, second- and third-levels and how the subject can promote reflection in faith communities, help those of a variety of worldviews in their search for meaning, contribute to the development of responsible citizens, and encourage dialogue in society (Byrne & Kieran, 2013).

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Table 1

Scale properties

Measures	N items	alpha	Mean	SD
Oxford Happiness Inventory	29	.91	42.8	12.9
Religious affect	24	.97	79.1	24.4
Extraversion	6	.75	4.6	1.7
Neuroticism	6	.66	3.5	1.7

Table 2

Correlation matrix

	OHI	N	E	Rel	Age	Sex
Ireland (North)	.02	-.09***	.06***	.13***	.34***	.02
Sex (female)	-.07***	.21***	.10***	.13***	.06***	
Age	-.05***	.03	.03	.05***		
Religious affect	.15***	.09***	.03*			
Extraversion (E)	.30***	-.20***				
Neuroticism (N)	-.36***					

Note: *, $p < .05$; **, $p < .01$; ***, $p < .001$

Ireland is coded: Republic (1) and Northern (2)

Table 3

Regression model: Location on religious affect

Predictors	r^2	Increase			<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
		r^2	F	<i>p</i> <			
Sex	.016	.016	73.0	.001	.110	7.3	.001
Age	.017	.002	7.4	.01	.004	0.3	NS
Extraversion (E)	.018	.000	1.8	NS	.039	2.6	.01
Neuroticism (N)	.022	.005	21.9	.001	.061	4.0	.001
Northern Ireland	.038	.015	73.3	.001	.132	8.6	.001

Table 4

Regression model: Location on personal happiness

Predictors	Increase				<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ²	F	<i>p</i> <			
Sex	.004	.004	19.1	.001	-.03	-2.3	.05
Age	.007	.003	12.3	.001	-.07	-4.6	.001
Extraversion (E)	.105	.098	490.2	.001	.25	17.8	.001
Neuroticism (N)	.190	.084	464.4	.001	-.31	-21.5	.001
Northern Ireland	.190	.000	0.0	NS	.00	0.2	NS

Table 5

Regression model: Religious affect and location on personal happiness

Predictors	r^2	Increase			<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
		r^2	F	<i>p</i> <			
Sex	.004	.004	19.2	.001	-.05	-3.7	.001
Age	.007	.003	12.0	.001	-.07	-4.7	.001
Extraversion (E)	.105	.098	487.6	.001	.24	17.5	.001
Neuroticism (N)	.190	.084	463.6	.001	.32	-22.7	.001
Religious affect	.220	.030	171.2	.001	.18	13.2	.001
Northern Ireland	.200	.000	2.2	NS	-.02	-1.5	NS